

Sunday School

PAUL ON CHRISTIAN LOVE.

August 29, 1909. 1 Cor. 13: 1-13.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."—1 Cor. 13:13

DAILY HOME READINGS.

M.—1 Cor. 13:1-13. T.—James 2:1-9.
W.—Ps. 133. Th.—Matt. 22:34-40.
F.—John 15:10-17. S.—Luke 10:25-37.
S.—1 John 4:7-21.

SHORTER CATECHISM.

Q. 70. Which is the seventh commandment?

A. The seventh commandment is, "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

TOPICAL OUTLINE.

The Supremacy of Love—

Over spiritual gifts, vs. 1-3.

In its nature and results, vs. 4-7.

Because it abides forever, vs. 8-13.

LESSON COMMENTS.

An extended comment on this chapter is impossible in the short space allowed for the Lesson. Let us rather look at the setting of the gem. We may not analyze the gem, but by placing it in its proper setting we may see more of its value and beauty. The chapter is not a detached portion of the epistle; but among the many solutions given by the Apostle for the many troubles of the Corinthian Church, this chapter is the highest and best solution of all their troubles and contentions.

Paul had probably made a short visit to this church during his pastorate at Ephesus and had found that affairs in the church were not altogether desirable. Apollos had also returned to Ephesus and his report of the conditions gave the Apostle much uneasiness. Later the household of Chloe had brought the same tidings.

The Apostle wrote a letter to the Corinthians to correct some of the abuses which had arisen. This letter is lost. It appears, however, that the Corinthians either did not understand his directions about discipline of offending members or affected not to understand so they sent to the Apostle asking him to give direction and explanations about certain questions arising in their church life. This first epistle is the answer to these questions. While he gives directions as to the proper course to pursue in each case, the 13th chapter is the universal solution of all the questions. If the Corinthians are actuated by Christian love or charity, the vexatious problems will either not arise or they will be settled quickly and righteously by a regard for the welfare of others.

One trouble in the church was the party spirit. "One said I am of Paul; another I of Cephas, etc." The Gentile Christians who were brought up free from the Mosaic law, were probably those who claimed they were of Paul. Among these were some who while not differing from the doctrine of Paul were more attached to the eloquence of Apollos. Then there were the Judaizers who claimed that they were of Cephas and observed to some extent the Jewish law. Others said they were of Christ, claiming to be the only genuine Christians. These were probably the worst class and the most sectarian faction in the congregation, as is commonly the case even today with those who claim to be Christians to the exclusion of all others. This was one trouble at which the 13th chapter was aimed.

Another evil was the violation of the seventh commandment. Many of the Christians were addicted to sins of impurity which they had practiced in their heathenism. So notorious was Corinth for its licentiousness, that we cannot wonder that even the Christians looked upon impure practices with some tolerance and some engaged in them.

Another question arising was their conduct in reference to the sacrificial offerings and feasts of the heathen. Some were accustomed not only to eat of meat offered to idols but also to attend the feasts held in the temples. This gave rise to trouble among the brethren. If they had the love

that seeketh not her own, they would have had more regard for the consciences of their weaker brethren.

Some of them had been taking their disputes before the heathen magistrates, not only quarreling with each other but advertising their differences before the scoffers and showing to the heathen world their lack of love.

The seventh chapter is taken up with a discussion of marriage and divorce and celibacy. Many abuses had arisen in connection with these subjects.

Then again their abuses of public worship had produced scandal. The women spoke in public unveiled which was contrary to custom and decency. The Lord's Supper was degraded into a common meal where the rich ate together and nothing was left for the poor. This ordinance instead of being a communion among those who loved Jesus and one another was the occasion of separation and hard feelings.

The possession of spiritual gifts, such as prophecy and speaking of tongues, had also given occasion for envying and discontent on the part of those who had not these, and undue exaltation and pride on the part of those more highly favored. The Apostle in the 13th chapter tells them that all of these gifts, whether faith or knowledge or the power to work miracles would be of no avail without love. This is the highest grace and is to endure when their prophecy and speaking with tongues shall have passed away. He taught them that if they had this love in connection with their other gifts that it would prevent their vaunting themselves.

Having a high regard for the philosophy of the Greeks, many of these Christians had adopted the belief of the philosophers in regard to the resurrection. They either denied the resurrection or explained it in the Gnostic sense. Some of them had gone so far as to adopt the sensuality of their Epicurean neighbors, whose motto was "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

This epistle is the most diversified of all Paul's letters and the contents are of the deepest interest to all churches. We have an insight into the conditions in that church which was most in contact with heathenism. It is the picture of a Christian congregation where pure devotion and great zeal was mixed with self seeking and tinged by the corruption of heathen practices. Out of the darkness of the troubles which they were undergoing, God through the letter of the Apostle gives the church of all ages light upon many of its vexatious problems.

Though we may deplore their unbelief in the resurrection, it was this unbelief which gave us the 15th chapter on the sure and certain hope of immortality. Though deploring the divisions among them and the lack of charity toward each other we have the 13th chapter, which has softened animosities for centuries. Truly God maketh the wrath of man to praise Him.

By this chapter we are led to refer our gifts to their proper sphere reserving for love the first place among the Christian graces. We are told of the motive force that controls our lives and makes them fruitful for God—Christian love. We are taught how this love operates in our lives and the fruit that it bears and the results that it accomplishes. We are taught its eternity, that though all other gifts may pass away, that which makes us like God and His Christ can never pass away. That the love, the faith, the hope which are the three which shall abide, teaches us to trust that heavenly Father whose ways we can see only as by a reflection in the mirror, but whom we shall see face to face. He who has in him these three, Faith, Hope, and Love has the principle of eternity in himself.

T. M. Hunter.

BIBLES PUBLISHED IN 412 LANGUAGES.

Interesting details of the progress made by the Bible among savage heathen tribes all over the world are provided in the annual report of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

The Society has published the Scriptures, or portions of them, in no fewer than 412 languages, and is always adding to the number. During the past year sections of the Bible have been printed in Lengua, a language spoken by the Indians of the Paraguayan Chaco; in Lu-Nyankole, the tongue of a tribe inhabiting the region southwest of Uganda, and in Hindu-Sindhi, a dialect current among the Hindu inhabitants of Sindhi.